

Mc Dougall's Good Stories for Children

Weird Punishment Which Came to Boys and Girls Who Played Truant and Fell Into the Hippodankus' Clutches

VENTURE to assert that no more than ten people have ever heard of the twelve-legged, fan-tailed Hippodankus, and scarcely half as many know anything about the splay-footed, flap eared, pop-eyed Pedunculus. The reason for this lack of knowledge regarding animals that once were much talked of is that for many years, sixty or seventy years very likely, neither of these creatures has appeared in any civilized country, although it is, perhaps, quite probable that in such remote and thinly populated lands as Mozambique, Patagonia or East Timbuctoo they may have often existed without attracting the attention of newspaper correspondents or travelers.

Thus when Sam Meeker first heard of the Hippodankus he was naturally very curious, indeed, and wished to know much more than most people were able to tell him about its appearance and habits.

Sam Meeker and Harry Grant were two boys, who, although very unlike in all respects, found much to admire in each other, and were constantly together. They were also partners in an enterprise that engaged most of their spare time. This was the breeding and raising of carrier pigeons, and they had several dozens of very fine birds which they had themselves raised and of which they were very proud.

Neither of them went to school without having a bird in hand to release at the school door so that it might fly swiftly home and thus practice in order to develop speed and endurance, and they were constantly making journeys to distant places for the same purpose, for a carrier pigeon, as you may perhaps know, thus learns how to wing its way home from a distance of hundreds of miles, and the ones that can fly the farthest are very valuable indeed.

While both boys were very much absorbed in this pursuit Sam never neglected his studies, but Harry was often guilty of playing hooky in order to devote more time to birds, especially in the autumn, which is the favorite time for speeding carriers. Many another boy was guilty of the same fault, for the brown and red of the woods tempted them to go where the rattling nuts were falling down in the brisk winds and the squirrels were making away with them fast. Not a few girls, also, I regret to say, fell victims to the temptation, although I do not believe there is another town anywhere of which such a thing could be said, for very few girls are truants.

But I fear that there were in Edgerville-on-the-Creek many girls who were tomboys; wild, harum-scarum lasses who did not fear a cow any more than a boy does; at any rate, they played hooky as did the lads and suffered the same punishment for it, too.

For the punishment came upon the little town, and it came without warning or prediction of trouble, just when the teacher was beginning to believe that an epidemic of truancy had broken out, and was seriously contemplating resigning his position. One morning more than a dozen boys and girls were missing from their beds, which, however, showed that they had been slept in, and when nightfall came without one of them appearing at home the whole town was in an uproar.

People stood at the street corners and speculated or talked of dragging the creek, for many supposed that the lost ones had been drowned, or searched the woods near town with lanterns for traces of the missing children until far into the night; and then a greater uproar broke out, for it was then found that many more children were not in their beds where they had gone early in the evening. There was something so mysterious in this that nobody knew what to think or do.

Fathers and mothers hurried excitedly through the town with candles, lanterns and lamps seeking for their offspring, and there was an awful wailing when at last it was seen that they had really vanished.

Next day nobody worked or talked of anything but this disaster.

Forty-two children were missing, and every boy and girl was frightened almost into spasms, but it was discovered later in the day by a philosopher named Quigg, who kept the paper stand at the station, that only those children who played hooky and were generally disobedient to their parents were missing, while all the real good children still remained. He said he didn't think it was such a disaster as people supposed, provided the lost children remained lost. But, of course, none of the parents who had lost their children could see it in that light, and the scene that morning was simply indescribable.

The grief increased to a mighty woe when at evening an old man named Smithers, a venerable, white-bearded man of ninety-nine years, was reminded of a similar calamity that occurred in his youth, and after much reflection he managed to recall all the circumstances, as well as the names and dates. This is what he said:

"When I was about eighteen, or it might be nineteen, I dunno, there war a precisely similar happenin' right here in Edgerville, only they called it Nigger Hill in them days. All the children that played hooky were took off in a night or two, same as now, and we never got 'em back, neither."

"What got them?" asked Sam Meeker, eagerly.

"The Twelve-legged Hippodankus got 'em, the fan-tailed, twelve-legged Hippodankus, that's what got 'em, and that's what's got these 'ere kids, too, I reckon. Nothin' else could have ketches so many youngsters all at once. I remember the old folks a-sayin' that several times afore that it had happened, and 'Squire Langdon, who useter own all these parts, lost eight boys at once. They did say that this ere creature came a swoopin' down in the dark and yanked the children right out o' bed and whisked away with 'em afore you could say 'Jack Robinson'."

"They's another curious anamile that goes along with the Hippodankus, so they say, and it's name is splay-footed, pop-eyed, flat-eared Pedunculus, and its job is to sneak around and spy out all the children that play hooky and report 'em to the Hippodankus so's he don't lose time a-seekin' and a-sortin' 'em out."

Sam was but half convinced by the old man's statement, for it seemed very improbable that such an animal could exist without getting into the Natural History book at school, and he went to work upon an investigation of his own that soon, however, proved the old man to have been correct.

Sam found many footprints of an enormous animal in the back yard of the houses that had lost children, tracks as broad as a dining-table pressed deeply into the soil, and all indicating that the creature had been traveling in a southeasterly direction, picking up the ill-fated boys and girls as it went. He saw the tracks, too, of a smaller animal, sometimes in advance and again in the rear of the other, as if it had been gyrating around in glee. Ready to pursue his investigation to the end, he requested Mr. Beasley Titters, the richest man in Edgerville-by-the-Creek, to lend him his big red automobile in order to follow the tracks to the animals' lair. This Mr. Titters readily agreed to, and even hinted that he might go himself, but he backed out at the last moment and Sam started off alone, cheered by the encouraging words of all the townspeople.

He had an ample supply of food, most of it consisting of



"I Smell Fresh Boy!" Cried the Hippodankus

such provender as would keep well, such as pretzels, frankfurters, doughnuts, cheese, lemon-pies, ham-sandwiches and chocolate, for he was not sure of obtaining supplies on the road.

Just as he was about to depart he observed a pigeon fly in an almost exhausted condition to the coop, and immediately examining it he discovered that it bore the following letter from Harry Grant:

My Dear Sam:

I am in the power of the Hippodankus away up on top of a mountain plateau somewhere south of Edgerville. There are seventy-nine other children here, and the animal goes off every night for more. There is such a steep and awful cliff around us that we can't escape, and at the foot of that a wide stream of hot water, so you see we are in an awful scrape.

We have to work all the time polishing, with our hands, diamonds and rubies out in the forms of fruits, and when the children's hands get hard and callous the Hippodankus throws them over into the hot water and they are drowned. Every night before he sends us to bed he searches every boy's pockets to see that he hasn't stolen any of the diamonds, but he doesn't search the girls because they have no pockets. I happened to be handling this pigeon when the thing got me and so I brought it with me. That's all from your partner, HARRY GRANT.

It was unfortunate that Harry could not have furnished Sam with more definite directions, but he started off to the southeast, as all the tracks pointed in that direction, and traveled all day without seeing anything of interest. In fact, the country was almost a desert, and traveling became very monotonous after several days had passed without his meeting a human being or seeing a house, but when at last there loomed up on the horizon a tall, flat-topped mountain, he was cheered by the hope that at last he was nearing the abode of the animal.

Increasing his speed he hastened along, but suddenly stopped on observing ahead of him a high mass of white rocks that gleamed like glass. When he was abreast of them he stopped, seeing a sort of cave at the entrance to which there lay several rows of children's new shoes. This was a surprising circumstance, and he had seen so little of interest that it aroused more than ordinary curiosity. He jumped out of his automobile and examined the shoes, when he heard a voice within the cave shout:

"Don't go yet, oncet. I have here a couple of pairs more, alretty!"

While he stood in surprised silence there ran out a little dwarf dressed in faded red leather, who almost fell over backward on seeing a boy and an automobile there.

"Oh!" he cried, "I didn't think it was you. I tinked it was dot Hinkydinkus feller! He comes around about dis time for dem shoes for dem shildrens. I guess you have somethings to do mit him, ain't it?"

"Not yet," replied Sam, "but I expect to pretty soon. I am looking for the Hippodankus, right now. So you make shoes for his captured children, do you?"

"Yes, dot's my job. I am de dwarf of der Crystal rocks. I am a prisoner yet shoost like de rest of dem."

"Is there no way to slay this animal?" asked Sam.

"Vot! Kill dot Hinkydink! Impossibleness yet! It can't be didded. Notting can touch him; dot is, notting but a sudden and very severe shock to his feelings alretty a couple of times."

"I don't see how that can be done," said Sam, doubtfully.

"Nexder did I, but I tote you apout it, oncet."

"Well," said Sam, "I will have my lunch here in the shade of these rocks." He produced some pretzels and frankfurters and began to eat, whereat the eyes of the dwarf popped out in hungry desire.

"Py Chiminy, I ain't seed a pretzel nor a frankfurter for two huntent years alretty! Giff me yet a bite, oncet."

Sam readily gave him all he could eat, which so delighted the dwarf that he danced in glee.

"Now, you are a nice feller, unt I will help you owet. Dot Hinkydinkus comes back here pretty quick, unt ven he gets here you are a goner alretty. Now I haf got me a magicalness umbrella vot makes you mit a complete invisibility ven you raise it oncet. Den he can't see you and you schmile at him in your arms yet; I mean up your sleeves. I get it quick."

He ran into the cavern and emerged instantly with a small yellow umbrella, which he suddenly opened and instantly vanished from Sam's view.

"How's dot for a goning away yet?" said his voice from the empty air, startling Sam immensely yet delighting him, too. "Now dot's how it works," added the dwarf, appearing as suddenly with the closed umbrella in his hand. "Dot's yours, my son."

"But why do you not use it to escape from the Hippodankus?" inquired Sam, as he took the umbrella.

"Vat's de use? I can't cross the streams mit it, unt so I only could go as far as the next river, oncet."

"You could go home with me in my automobile," suggested the boy.

"I can carry you across rivers, for I go by the bridges," the dwarf reflected, but suddenly started and whispered:

"Put up dot umprella, quick. I hear dot Hinkydink coming."

Sam raised the umbrella in a hurry, and just in time, for through the air came a monster as large as forty elephants, its bat-like wings spreading out for yards and yards. Its head was somewhat like that of an enormous lizard, all warty and with long, stiff bristles projecting from it, and its fan-shaped tail spread out behind like a cloud, while its twelve long legs hung down, wriggling like a spider's. It was a terrific spectacle, and

Sam was thankful, indeed, for the umbrella that made him invisible when the thing swooped down before the cave and roared out:

"Who is here? I smell fresh boy!"

"Dere is nottings fresh to-day, but look around for yourself, as I have been too busy to watch owet. Meppe dere is poy around, unt I don't know it yet," said the dwarf, as he piled the shoes up before his master, the Hippodankus.

"What is this thing?" asked the monster, looking at the automobile.

"Dot is voost what I was going to ask you, alretty. It came here dis morning, unt I tink it is some kind of a queer animal."

The Hippodankus inspected the automobile very carefully, but could make nothing of it, and seeing that it was not alive he took up the shoes and darted into the air.

"He is mad!" whispered the dwarf, "because he didn't ketch any shildren to-day, oncet."

Sam was already in the automobile when a shrill voice called out:

"Hippodankus! There's somebody here whispering! Come back!"

It was the little Pedunculus, which had sneaked around unseen, for his sense of smell was keener than that of the big animal, and he was sure that there was a boy somewhere. Even now he could not tell where, but he wished the Hippodankus to assist him to find the concealed lad. But Sam started the automobile and moved off like the monster, and the little one simply had to follow the big one.

They fled along like the wind, and entered a marvelous forest in which Sam would have been pleased to remain for a space, but he feared to lose the animals.

In this wondrous woods grew trees that bore, instead of ordinary fruit, although he could see that there was plenty of that, also, all sorts of cakes, cookies, buns, chocolate-cakes, tarts and cream-puffs. In fact, everything that is made in the finest bakery could be found growing there in abundance. Here were trees with gingerbread or jelly-cake bark, there were bushes bearing lady-fingers or macaroons or sponge cakes, trees with chocolate leaves or whole pumpkin pies almost breaking down the branches.

Suddenly he saw spreading before him a wide sheet of smooth water, from the surface of which he discerned clouds of steam rising, which revealed that it was hot water and which he knew must be that which Harry had mentioned in his letter. Beyond it rose sheer into the air an awful cliff, with sides as smooth as glass. Away at the top he discovered specks of color which he concluded were children watching for the return of their captor. In another instant the Hippodankus disappeared beyond the verge of this cliff, followed by the little Pedunculus, and Sam was obliged to halt at the edge of the hot stream.

He was now as near as he could get to the retreat of the monster, and nothing more could be done, at least while it remained there. Sam turned to the forest of cakes, where he sat down to a perfect feast of fresh goodies that were far finer than he could buy, even were he rich, anywhere in Edgerville-by-the-Creek.

He now waited for night to come, thinking that was the time that the monster would go forth again, but toward sunset he was delighted to see it flying away swiftly to the north. He had already formed a plan of communicating with the prisoners on the plateau above, and had made a big megaphone of the linoleum that lay upon the floor of the automobile. When he reached the shore of the hot river he shouted through the megaphone, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing numerous heads show over the edge of the cliff.

He called for Harry Grant, and in a moment the boy appeared, and recognizing Sam's voice was amazed and delighted. Harry told him to get some cardboard and make a big megaphone for himself, and in a few minutes this was done and the two lads were holding an animated conversation. Harry said that they were suffering from their diet of cake and wished for some bread and meat, almost falling over the cliff when Sam told him that he had frankfurters in his automobile.

He said that already his hands were growing horny with polishing the diamond pears and apples, and when Harry suggested that he toss some down to him, he said that was impossible as the Hippodankus always carefully searched every boy's pockets before they left the diamond-room.

"You say he never searches the girls?" asked Sam.

"Certainly not," replied Harry. "They have no pockets."

"Good! I have an idea!" shouted Sam. "Have the girls sew pockets inside of their dresses, and they can carry cut all they want if you think he won't miss them."

"He will never miss them," Harry replied. "He has millions of them. I think he must have been getting them for hundreds of years."

"All right," said Sam, "get the girls to work at once, so as to be ready by dark. Have every girl stitch herself a pocket."

"Aw, what's the use," Harry replied. "We couldn't do anything with them. We never expect to get away from here."

"You do as I say," said Sam, "and leave the rest to me. I will get you all away from here in a few days, if you have patience and do as I tell you. I will go away now," he continued, "but I will return as soon as possible, and when you hear me whistle, you come to the edge of the cliff with some other strong boys and be ready to take the rope that I will send to you."

"Ah, what's the matter with you?" yelled Harry, with a note of despair in his voice, "nobody could get a rope up here. Are you crazy?"

"Never mind how I will get the rope to you, but be ready for

How an Inventive Small Boy Saved His Friends Who Were Captured From Death and Won a Great Reward

it when it comes, and keep it to yourselves. Do not appear happy or contented, for that will make the Hippodankus suspect something, and don't talk about it, either, among yourselves, or else that little animal will overhear you and spoil the whole plan.

"Don't forget to grab all the diamond fruits you can. Good bye, now, for I am off."

With a feeling of deep disappointment Harry watched the automobile move rapidly away from the river's edge and thread its way through the forest, but this feeling was suddenly changed to one of alarm as he detected the wily, agile Pedunculus following the machine at some distance to the rear, evidently keeping out of sight from motives of caution or fear.

Harry shouted in loud tones, for none knew better than he that danger threatened anybody whom that slippery little creature followed, for although it was perfectly harmless itself, it never failed to bring its enormous companion to its assistance.

But he failed to make his voice reach Sam as he rushed through the cake forest. Soon both Sam and his pursuer disappeared among the green foliage of the woods, and Harry went back to his little comrades, many of whom had heard all that Sam had proposed to do, and were so blue-eyed and hopeful that he feared the Hippodankus would suspect something the very moment he returned, and although he was buoyed up by their confidence in himself to some degree, he cautioned them to conceal their joy.

He was well aware that his chum was a boy of an inventive mind, and down in Harry's heart was the conviction that he would succeed in the attempt, but because he could not conjecture how Sam could possibly get a rope way up to the top of that cliff he was not willing to readily admit that it could be done, and besides he was a trifle mortified that Sam did not inform him of all of his plan.

Sam knew that Harry, while a good-hearted sort of lad, could not hold his tongue and was very fond of boasting, therefore he had wisely refrained from telling his purpose, because he did not want every kid in the prison of the ravaging monster discussing its feasibility among themselves, so that perhaps the wily Pedunculus would hear them.

As Sam whisked along at full speed, which with the Titters automobile means sixty-nine miles per hour, over the very worst roads, he thought out all his plan and failed to find a weak spot in it, provided the monster remained away long enough for him to rescue the children.

He reached home at ten o'clock next morning, having made the distance in eighteen hours, although he had taken four and a half days to go to the Hotwater River. He immediately bought one of those red box-kites and a thousand feet of twine of the best quality, and a strong, well-made rope that would sustain many pounds weight. These he placed in the automobile, after which he procured all the ham sandwiches he could get, and then he started off without revealing his purpose to any one in Edgerville-by-the-Creek.

When he reached the Crystal Rocks he called out the dwarf. The latter said, with a chuckle:

"Chimminy crips, but you haff given dot Hankipanki feller a regular twister alretty! He has got him a shock and a goopie more, or meppe only one, will giff him a finishing yet. He was most crazy because dot Piddlemeule ting has told him dot you vos talking mit a phunnygraft to dot oder poy up dere. He was flying up and down mit rage and curiousness, unt dot Piddlemeule wink ting is waiting for you in de middle of de road up dere before you git to de wasser."

"Do you mean the Pedunculus?" asked Sam.

"Dot's it. It's waitin' for you oncet."

"I do hope it stays there and I'll run over it," cried Sam. When the swiftly moving machine was almost upon him the waiting Pedunculus took fright and sprang up to escape, but, agile as he was, the automobile was faster and it struck him in mid-air. He was thrown a hundred feet ahead, rolling over and over along the roadside, a mere mass of fur and blood, and so suddenly was he stricken that he never uttered a cry to warn the monster whom he served.

On they went, arriving at the river in a few minutes, and Sam took up the megaphone and summoned his comrade in clarion tones. In an instant the cliff was edged with children's heads, all peering down in curiosity and hope. Sam rigged up his kite and the strong wind carried it aloft, up and up, until it swept along the edge of the cliff and Harry grasped the cord as Sam directed.

"Now haul up the cord!" shouted Sam. "There's a rope fast to the end!"

Then Harry saw how it was to be accomplished, and he was much mortified that he had never thought of so simple a plan.

The children hauled heartily and soon the rope reached the top. Then Harry fastened it to a stout tree there, and one by one the children slid merrily down the rope and whizzed across the steaming hot water of the river and landed safe on the other side. They really enjoyed it, that is, all but a few timid ones who had little courage, and these Harry had to almost bully, even threatening to go away and leave them behind with the enraged Hippodankus before they dared make the attempt.

When they were all over Sam spread out the feast of ham sandwiches, and you should have seen those children pile into it! Not a sandwich could be found in two minutes, and why? The little girls presented Sam with diamonds and ruby peaches, pears and apples as big as life, the most marvelous things anybody had ever seen in all the world. Each girl had about a half dozen, and many of the boys also had a supply, gathered at various times the day before by the girls from the vast storeroom above.

But while they were laughing and rejoicing as they started for home, an awful yell rent the air. All eyes instantly turned to the frowning cliff, and there they saw the head of the Hippodankus hanging limp and with gasping, wide-open jaws over the precipice. He had fainted from the terrible shock of finding that his prisoners had escaped, and even as they gazed convulsion after convulsion swept his frame, until with one last quiver he died.

Sam, watching him expire, felt also a keen sense of disappointment that he had not left Harry up there until the animal had died so that he could have lowered down many a bag of the precious diamond fruits, for he well knew that nothing so magnificent had ever been seen on earth before, but now it was too late.

However, when at last the children reached home—and you may be sure they did not, like Sam, linger in passing through the cake forest, having far too much of such provender—all the people were crazy to know what the Hippodankus looked like, and so Sam has organized a balloon expedition to try to procure the monster's body and bring it back to Edgerville-by-the-Creek in order to have it stuffed and placed in the museum there. If this attempt succeeds, and I do not see how it can fail in charges of so clever a lad, all will then be enabled to see just what used to stretch the boys and girls who hated to go to school in chestnutting time.

WALT McDUGALL.